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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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BLAME THE INVENTORS OF WRITING

This month children return to school for another year of struggle with the written word. What is the sense of it and who started it all anyway. The trouble first began about 5,000 years ago in Mesopotamia and in Egypt, with the invention of writing.

Whether you are glad or sorry that mankind ever hit upon this means of storing up knowledge, you will find the Royal Ontario Museum's exhibits of the earliest writings a fascinating study. Both the Mesopotamian and the Egyptian systems in the beginning were an attempt to record events and ideas through the use of standardized pictures. In Mesopotamia writing was done on soft clay with a wedge-shaped instrument. Through the centuries the picture forms evolved into a system of wedge-shaped marks. In Egypt a corresponding change is seen in the brush writing on papyrus, although the pictographs carved in stone scarcely altered during 3,000 years of history. The Egyptian script shows mankind's first attempt to formulate characters representing single sounds instead of syllables and whole words. Since both these countries also developed numerical systems—in Mesopotamia with units of 60, in Egypt with units of 10—we may truly say that they are responsible for the pangs of reading, writing and 'rithmetic

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DO YOU KNOW that the big Pileated Woodpecker or "Cock-of-the-Woods" is increasing in southern Ontario? Records in the Royal Ontario Museum show that it had virtually vanished from this region by 1900. It started to increase about 1930.

HOW IS CLOTH MADE?

Did you ever think of how much engineering skill is involved in making a common everyday sheet? Thousands of fine threads must be worked together in the weaving, and each one of those threads has first to be made by combining millions of short fibres. So many centuries of accumulated knowledge and tradition lie behind our modern textile industry that we are apt to look upon the products of the loom as a commonplace thing, and do not appreciate the marvels of their manufacture.

A special exhibition in the Royal Ontario Museum illustrates the technical background of cloth making. The exhibits are from many parts of the world, and range in date from prehistoric times to the present day. Every stage in the making of a fabric is shown, from the raw fibre to the finished article. Different methods of spinning fibres together to make a thread are explained, and a wide variety of spindles and spinning wheels are on exhibition. Looms of many types are set up ready for weaving, and the varied ways of achieving patterns are illustrated by large diagrams and by fabrics selected from the Museum's vast textile collections.

Modern craftsmen will be particularly interested, for many of the techniques shown are readily adaptable to present day looms. The exhibit, however, is mainly designed to give the average person a better understanding of the materials they use to clothe themselves and to furnish their homes.

WANTED—A MODERN PIED PIPER

There is more truth than fiction in the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Behind this fanciful tale lies a state of affairs that has plagued agriculture for centuries, namely, periodic outbreaks of mice and voles. A special exhibit on this subject is found in the Royal Ontario Museum, complete with the Piper and his magic flute. It shows how in real life the role of Pied Piper is played in part by the animals of prey which rid the fields of thousands of destructive rodent pests.

Although animal plagues occur throughout the world they have been particularly severe in the agricultural districts of Europe and Asia. The Pied Piper of Hamelin is perhaps the best known story of one of these outbreaks, but history, starting with the Bible, has recorded many instances. Such plagues have had a strong influence on the affairs of mankind, causing famines, even affecting the trends of war. It has been disclosed only recently that Germany suffered severely from a plague of mice and voles in the critical years of 1917 and 1918. Crops over large areas were completely destroyed and this, in the opinion of men competent to judge, was a factor in hastening the surrender of the Germans in 1918.

The factors involved in the serious outbreaks of these crop-destroyers are still but poorly understood and the subject is receiving a great deal of attention from modern biologists. Britain, with her Bureau of Animal Population at Oxford, is perhaps the centre of such studies. However, the problem is an international one and fellow scientists in North America and Russia are also working hard on the why's and wherefore's of rodent plagues. The practical object of their search is for a modern equivalent of the Pied Piper's magic flute which will enable us at least to control, if not prevent, these devastating outbreaks of rodents.

MUSEUM JEWELLERY TREASURES

A case of jewellery has just been rearranged and placed on exhibit in the Etruscan gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum. It is full of tiny treasures, so delicate that most of them cannot be fully appreciated without the aid of a magnifying glass. But you can enjoy the glitter of pure gold, the delicate design of the lion reposing on the great brooch, the bull or lion or even girls' heads as earrings, covered with minute ropes of filigree or wee balls of gold that encrust the design. This process of embellishing with gold is known as "granulation" because the minute spheres are no larger than grains. It is a lost art today. But it sets off the design with gold of rough texture, cleverly contrasted with the smooth and shining surface. However, not all the ornaments are small. One gold locket has a great face of blue-glass, and a decorative head band would hold down even a modern hair-do. The costume-jewellers might get some good ideas here—only they'd better not make them of pure gold.

MUSEUM HOURS

Open Week Days except Monday 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m
Sundays 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.